

March 11, 2010

SUBJECT MATTER: Governor's March 1, 2010 Deficit Mitigation Plan

Testimony in support of maintaining the **Community Investment Act Fund**

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My brother and I milk 250 cows and farm 650 acres in Northwestern Connecticut. I am part of an agricultural network that has benefited greatly from various aspects of the Community Investment Act such as Connecticut Grown, Farm Viability Grants, Farm Land Preservation, and The Dairy Program.

The Connecticut Grown program was initiated before LOCAL was popular. The Department of Agriculture understood that supporting agriculture in our communities was fundamentally necessary to maintain a vibrant, local and healthy food supply to benefit the people of Connecticut. The Connecticut Grown brand is established and the program operates successfully, providing the best safest foods, and where the farmer and the consumer are neighbors.

The Farm Viability Grants have been a huge success. This program is a great example of how a small push from the State produces long a term revenue for the town, that far exceeds the cost of the program. The grant funds up to 50% of permanent improvements that then provide property tax revenue for the town. Meanwhile the program updates and fortifies local agricultural pursuits. It is a win program that bolsters the local tax base.

The Farmland Preservation program is key to maintaining the most basic aspect of agriculture and the foundation for the character of Connecticut. Our program has stepped up to meet the need of preserving land before it is lost forever to development. The people of our State understand the value and necessity for a strong committed agricultural land base.

The final and newest aspect of the Community Investment Act is the dairy program. We dairy farmers have been rescued by the safety net legislation passed last year. Our losses, which threatened the very viability of our businesses, have been mitigated by this dairy program. The program is designed as a safety net and as the cost payment dynamic improves the state liability declines. So far our market has been basically flat with projected improvements similar to the general economy. The Community Investment Act help is limited by the dollars collected. They have been very helpful but only met one third of the calculated need last quarter. The benefit of the program is that it underpins a billion dollar dairy industry with over 4000 jobs on over 70,000 acres. That investment was clear last year and remains critical this year as well.

I request that you NOT remove 5 million dollars from the Community Investment Act Fund as recommended in the Governor's Deficit Mitigation Plan.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Freund
Freund's Farm
East Canaan, Connecticut